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Defence Staff says it was asked for permission for alleged CIA flight

The Ministry of Defence says that permission had been granted by the Defence Staff for the flight of a US Hercules transport plane which landed at Helsinki-Vantaa Airport in May 2003.

According to the ministry, the Civil Aviation Administration had received a request on April 23rd, 2003 for permission to land in Helsinki. According to the request, the plane carried supplies for the US Embassy in Helsinki. The document stated that the plane had a crew of ten, and no passengers.

Because the flight was by a foreign government, the request was forwarded to the Defence Staff, which granted permission in early May.

Defence Ministry communications chief **Jyrki Iivonen** said that because of a computer error, there was no immediate information about the granting of permission. The document was found in a manual search.

It remains uncertain how long the plane remained on the ground in Finland, whether or not any cargo was unloaded, and if any additional cargo was taken on in Helsinki.

The plane, owned by the company Prescott Support, is reported to have been used by the CIA for the secret transport of prisoners.

Human Rights Watch says that the CIA has had several detention centres in Europe, from where suspected terrorists have been taken to other locations for interrogation.

The Prescott Support plane is not on the Human Rights Watch list of suspected planes. However, it is mentioned in some sources.

"Nothing suggests that prisoners would have been transported on the plane. However, this cannot be entirely ruled out", Iivonen notes.

"All information is in the request for permission. In cases like this, our starting point is that we trust the applicant."

According to Iivonen, it appears that the same plane has not flown other government flights to Finland.

"The matter is being investigated further. As this case shows, surprises are always possible."

Iivonen says that the matter is closed as far as the Ministry of Defence is concerned. The Finnish Security Police (SUPO) have asked the CIA for a clarification of alleged prisoner transport flights. The European Union has also submitted a request for further information from the United States.

Helsingin Sanomat